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update

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Draper signs $20 million project for rehabilitation in Somalia

UNDP Administrator William H. Draper III flew to Somalia to officially sign, on 5 February, a US$20 million rehabilitation programme aimed at helping the people of that beleaguered nation rebuild their famine-ridden and strife-torn lives.

The programme, which began in December through UNDP's Office for Project Services (OPS), will assist grass-roots communities in identifying and prioritizing their needs, mobilizing resources, and ultimately implementing development projects. This community-based approach to rehabilitation is particularly important in a country like Somalia, which operates without a government infrastructure.

Community cooperation will be enlisted to ensure that projects are neither looted nor destroyed—a problem with previous work undertaken in Somalia.

Activities will begin in the northwest and northeast of the country, where there is less strife. Some of the projects currently underway there are restoring electric power generators and rehabilitating schools.

Work will also be undertaken in the strife-ridden south, where UNDP, along with the international non-governmental organization (NGO) Save the Children USA, is overseeing the rehabilitation of an irrigation system that has been neglected for three years in lower Shabelle, an area about 100 miles from Mogadishu, which was once a breadbasket. The project is expected to increase the local production of food and also to attract some of the people who fled this region during the civil war.

In addition, the rehabilitation programme will seek to reintegrate into the community demilitarized soldiers and other displaced people through immediate job creation and training programmes.

Work on all of the projects will be coordinated with other UN agencies, including the World Food Programme, the International Labour Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization. Funding for the Somalia rehabilitation programme includes a $2 million grant from the Italian government and some $18 million in UNDP aid.

While in Somalia, Mr. Draper also signed a $1 million project aimed at producing a mid-term rehabilitation plan for Somalia. This plan will include input from Somali officials, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, NGOs, UN agencies, major donors, and investment banks.

Forum on nuclear safety in former Soviet Union

UNDP and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are embarking on a joint initiative to strengthen radiation and nuclear safety in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. The initiative will be discussed at an international forum, planned for April 1993 in Vienna that will include ministerial officials, nuclear safety advisors, and representatives from the donor community and UN agencies.

Following the breakup of the former Soviet Union, several countries approached the IAEA for advice and assistance on developing and enhancing radiation protection and nuclear safety. Since then, donors have provided some technical assistance to help improve the safety of nuclear power plants.

But thus far, there have been no coordinated international initiatives to ensure the safety of other potentially dangerous facilities that use radioactive material, such as research reactors, uranium mines and mills, and installations that employ radiation for medicine, agriculture and industry.

Radiation exposure and contamination would have serious consequences for the population, environment, and economy of some 15 nations targeted by the joint-initiative: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirghistan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The Vienna forum is aimed at helping each of these countries map out the scope and magnitude of assistance needed to keep both nuclear and non-nuclear facilities safe. The session will lead to individual country aid packages, to include training seminars as well as direct assistance. The goal is to build adequate national infrastructures for radiation and nuclear safety and to strengthen national capacities for obtaining essential financial resources and managing assistance in this field.

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UNDP funds potato biotechnology research

UNDP is funding a $4.6 million project to reduce the use of costly and dangerous pesticides in potato farming through biotechnology.

Grown in 94 developing countries throughout Asia, Latin America and Africa, the potato yields nutritious food on less land and in harsher climate than most other crops. Because potatoes can be harvested after 60 days, growing more of them can increase the food supply for millions of hungry people around the world. But currently, pests, diseases and the widespread use of pesticides prevent potato farmers from realizing their full potential.

Pesticides have become disproportionately expensive for many farmers, who on average now spend about 20 per cent of their production costs on these chemicals. In addition, pesticides have caused pests and diseases to mutate into more resistant and virulent strains. This, in turn, fosters a need for even stronger pesticides.

High cost isn't the only disadvantage to using pesticides. Many of these dangerous chemicals are carcinogenic. This has led to health problems for the men and women who handle them and caused environmental damage to the surrounding plant and animal life.

The Centro Internacional de la Papa (CIP), a non-profit organization based in Lima, Peru, was established in 1972 to promote the utilization and development of the potato. Research has focused on developing through genetic engineering new breeds of potato and sweet potato capable of withstanding pests and diseases without the use of pesticides. Under the project, UNDP's OPS will monitor the activities undertaken by CIP, in collaboration with research organizations from more than 50 developing countries.

UNDP hosts forum with IDB on poverty in Latin America

Social reform and poverty reduction in Latin America were the main topics discussed at a three-day forum sponsored by UNDP and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) that began in Washington on 10 February.

While the problem of poverty is not new to Latin America, living conditions have actually worsened in recent years for large segments of the region's population. This is because the strengthening of many countries' economies through sounder macroeconomic policies has failed to raise the standard of living for the poorest segments of the population. In addition, a changing labour force and new technological requirements brought by the region's growing integration into the international economy have created a need for new development strategies that focus on increased investments in human capital and greater community participation.

The UNDP-IDB forum was designed to promote the exchange of ideas and experiences in order to facilitate new development strategies and social reforms in the region. Participants included policymakers, academicians, civic leaders and representatives from various international organizations and the private sector.

UNDP will continue funding for the disabled

A successful programme aimed at improving the lives of disabled people around the globe is receiving an additional grant of $695,000 from UNDP.

It is estimated that there are about 200 million moderately or severely disabled people living in developing countries. By the year 2050, this number is expected to increase to 435 million.

A large proportion of this disabled population is in desperate need of services ranging from care and rehabilitation to education, training and jobs.

But in most developing countries, the majority of disabled people are excluded from opportunities to influence plans and decisions taken to meet their needs.

In 1990, the Division for Global and Interregional Programmes (DGIP) set up an interregional programme aimed at turning this situation around. UNDP, in conjunction with a number of other UN agencies, donors and NGOs, has sought to strengthen national capacities to develop comprehensive policies, strategies and programmes based on the principles of community-based participation — especially from the disabled and their families.

Human rights and special training for local health care workers are some of the areas targeted by the programme in countries including Angola, Benin, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guatemala, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza.

Cleaning up Egypt's Lake Manzala

A cleanup is being planned for Egypt's largest coastal lake, which suffers from increasing industrial and municipal pollution. In preparation for a project to be funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP recently approved funding for a feasibility study of a proposed cleanup plan for Lake Manzala. The GEF is a comprehensive programme that gives special consideration to global environmental problems, including water pollution. It is managed jointly by UNDP, the World Bank, and the UN Environment Programme.

Lake Manzala is situated along the Mediterranean Sea between the Damiatta branch of the Nile and the Suez canal. In recent years, the quality of the lake's water has deteriorated because of municipal waste and industrial effluents.

Hoping to stem the pollution of this important water source, the Egyptian government approached the GEF for assistance in establishing an artificial wetland which would help reduce the amount of waste now dumped into the lake, and subsequently the Mediterranean Sea.

The plan, relatively simple, consists of a sediment trap, a series of artificial wetlands and an outdoor fish hatchery. Wastewater will be pumped from the main dumping drain into a sedimentation pond. Settled solids will be periodically dredged from the pond, then partially sun-dried before disposal or utilization.

The feasibility study will help determine some of the environmental and health impacts of this project as well as a possible site for the artificial wetlands.

Albert Schweitzer Award given to UNDP consultant

The 1992 Albert Schweitzer Award, one of international medicine's most prestigious honours, was awarded to Sir John Wilson of the United Kingdom for a lifetime of service on behalf of the disabled. Among his many activities, Sir John serves as Senior Consultant to IMPACT, an international initiative against avoidable disability which he helped to create in 1981, supported by UNDP, the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

Through IMPACT, Sir John has advised on numerous programmes to prevent disability, including mass delivery of low-cost surgical operations in rural areas to restore eyesight, hearing and limb function and large-scale polio immunization campaigns for children in India.

Sir John, who has been blind since the age of 12 following a school accident, said he was honoured to receive the award: "In our modern world of increasing violence but also of revolutionary healing technology, Albert Schweitzer's philosophy of 'Reverence for Life' has special relevance."

UNDP to assist rural farmers in Lebanon

UNDP will carry out a $1.3 million project aimed at rehabilitating and developing a farming region of Lebanon that was once a major source of drug crops, including opium poppy and cannabis.

The districts of Baalbeck and Hermel, which cover the northern part of the Bekaa Governate of Lebanon, are the target area of this project. The 200,000 people living here suffer from a lack of safe drinking water, insufficient sewerage systems, and extremely arid land that makes farming difficult. Here, income from agriculture and cattle grazed on the land is extremely low.

These hardships combined with the long-standing neglect of the region and insufficient law enforcement created conditions conducive to the cultivation of illicit drug crops. In 1991, the government of Lebanon led a campaign which was highly successful in eradicating these crops, but caused former drug crop farmers to suffer substantial economic losses and consequently worsened living conditions.

The UNDP project will help the farmers adapt to the changeover. Immediate assistance will help provide seeds, fertilizers and pesticides to increase the production of crops including wheat, barley, potatoes, lentils and chickpeas. The project will also assist the community in rehabilitating irrigation systems and setting up job training programmes and revolving credit schemes.

UNDP funds NGO-run urban environment initiatives

UNDP has approved nearly $200,000 in funding for two NGO-managed interregional initiatives aimed at helping municipal governments and community groups mobilize local resources to stem increasing environmental degradation in urban areas.

The initiatives are being funded under the Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment (LIFE), a programme created in response to UNDP's Earth Summit mandate. This called on UNDP to fund and coordinate technical cooperation activities related to Agenda 21, an 800-plus-page plan that maps out the global, regional and local initiatives needed to save the planet from environmental destruction.

Under one of the recently approved LIFE projects, UNDP will provide $84,646 in first-year funding to help local representatives from nine cities implement Agenda 21 strategies in their region. Monitored by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, the project will sponsor ongoing training, research, and referral support to help these local groups strengthen their ability to plan and manage environmentally sound development projects and cleanup strategies.

The other project, which received $93,300 in first-year support, will promote the development of new and sustainable technologies to provide safe drinking water and sanitation services in urban settings. This project will be carried out by the Habitat International Coalition, an independent network of more than 300 NGOs from around the world.

Last October, the LIFE programme officially launched its pilot phase in six countries: Brazil, Jamaica, Pakistan, Senegal, Tanzania and Thailand; Egypt, Morocco and Pakistan will be added this year and the programme will be expanded later to include 16 other countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Arab States.

The facility's capacity-building philosophy is similar to UNDP's Africa 2000 Network and the Asia Pacific 2000 initiative, which provide small grants for NGO-run development projects. But the reach of the LIFE programme is broader, because it promotes interaction among municipalities, community groups, and NGOs at the country level. Unlike the Asia and Africa initiatives, LIFE also supports regional and inter-regional projects and provides a mechanism for sharing and exchanging experience among NGOs, municipalities and UN agencies.

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Approved regional projects

(all projects subject to modification; sums quoted in US dollars)

Regional Strategies for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Amazon — The Amazon region contains the greatest biological diversity of any region in the world. Local communities obtain about 200,000 metric tons of fish yearly from native species alone. In addition, the Amazon contains about 4,000 species of lumber-producing trees, along with 2,000 other species of plants useful for various commercial purposes.

While the Amazon region has tremendous potential for providing sustainable benefits from natural resources, the forest environment is rapidly being degraded due to migration from settled areas, lack of funding for the management of reserved areas and resource exploitation. The Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) has established a Special Commission on the Amazonian Environment to develop common methodologies for the evaluation and management of the region's natural resources, and to promote other research to prevent the degradation of the Amazon forest.

UNDP's Amazon-conservation project aims to promote local and regional strategies for the environmentally sound management of the forest's biological resources. This project has three sub-programmes: 1) The first sub-programme will plan land use for the conservation and management of resources through ecological zoning and geographical monitoring of the Amazon basin. Regional capacities to assess and monitor the biological resources of the Amazon Basin will be strengthened through a Geographical Information System (GIS). 2) The second sub-programme will build institutional and human resource capabilities for the sustainable use of the forest. It will prepare research studies on major policy issues, assess the conservation needs of the region, and assist nations in developing a regional strategy for biodiversity management. 3) The third sub-programme will manage natural resources in indigenous territories in order to raise the standard of living of their inhabitants. It will prepare and implement projects together with indigenous communities in Bolivia, Colombia, and Ecuador. These projects will help assess the potential of environmental management strategies based on indigenous knowledge and traditions. Viable ways to sustainably manage natural resources with the involvement of local and indigenous communities living in the Amazon basin will be developed.

GEF contribution: $4,500,809. IDB contribution: $815,120. Funds will provide national and international personnel, subcontracts, training and equipment. Executed by UNDP's OPS. (RLA/92/G31/RLA/92/G32/RLA/92/G33/RLA/92/039)

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